

The Jews' Complaint Against "Americanism"

The Foreign Ghetto Is Held Up as a Preservative of Judaism; Jewish Life Said to Be Hindered in the United States

FROM the earliest record of the Jews' contact with other nations, no long period of years has ever passed without the charge arising that the Jews constitute "a people within a people, a nation within a nation." When this charge is made today it is vehemently denied by men who pose as the defenders of their people, and the denial is more or less countenanced by all the Jews of every class.

And yet there is nothing more clearly stated in Jewish teaching, nor more clearly indicated in Jewish life, than that the charge is true. *But whether the truth should be used against the Jews* is quite another question. If the Jews are a nation, their nationality founded upon the double ground of race and religion, it is certainly outside the bounds of reason that they should be asked or expected to de-racialize, de-nationalize and de-religionize themselves; but neither is it to be expected that they should bitterly denounce those who state the facts. It is only upon a basis of facts that a solution of any problem can come. Where blame attaches is here: that the evident facts are denied, as if no one but the Jews themselves knew that there are such facts.

If the Jews are to be continuously a nation, as they teach, and if the condition of "a nation within a nation" becomes more and more intolerable, then the solution must come through one of two things: a separation of the "nation" from the rest of the nations, or an exaltation of the "nation" above the rest of the nations. There is a mass of evidence in Jewish writings that the leaders expect both of these conditions to come—a separate nation and a super-nation; indeed the heart of Jewish teaching is, as quite fully illustrated in the last article, that Jewry is a separate nation now, and on the way to becoming a super-nation. It is only those appointed to address the Gentiles who deny this: the real rabbinate of Israel does not deny.

The Recognized Normal Jewish Type

NOW, in any investigation of the Jewish Question, the student is struck over and over again by the fact that what the Jews most complain of, they themselves began. They complain of what they call anti-Semitism; but it must be apparent to the dullest mind that there could never have been such a thing as anti-Semitism were there not first such a thing as Semitism.

And then take the complaint about the Jews having to live in ghettos. The ghetto is a Jewish invention. In the beginning of the invasion of European and American cities the Jews always lived by themselves because they wanted to, because they believed the presence of Gentiles contaminated them. Jewish writers, writing for Jews, freely admit this; but in writing for Gentiles, they refer to the ghetto as a surviving illustration of Gentile cruelty. The idea of contamination originated with the Jews; it spread by suggestion to the Gentiles.

And so with this fact of the separate "nation"; it was the Jews who first recognized it, first insisted upon it and have always sought to realize that separateness both in thought and action.

Nay, more, the true and normal type of Jew today believes that the influence of Americanism, or of any civilized Gentile state, is harmful to Judaism.

That is a serious statement and no amount of Gentile assertion will be sufficient to confirm it. Indeed, it is such a statement as the Gentile mind could not have evolved, because the trend of Gentile feeling is all in the opposite direction, namely, that Americanization is a good thing for the Jew. It is from authoritative Jewish sources that we learn this fact, that what we call civilizing influences are looked upon as being at enmity with Judaism.

It is not the Gentile who says that Jewish ideals, as ideals, are incompatible with life in our country; it is the Jew who says so. It is he who inveighs against Americanism, not the American who inveighs against Judaism.

As this article is one with the last, the same method of impassive presentation of the testimony will be followed. Readers of this study of the Jewish Question should know that neither rhetoric nor emotion will contribute a single element to the solution of the Question. We prefer to leave rhetoric and emotion to the anti-Semites who call names and to the pro-Semites who are apparently reduced to the same necessitous level.

Now, the first thing to know is this: that though Americanism is yet unfinished, Judaism has been complete for centuries; and while no American would think of pointing to any part of the country or to any group as representing the true and final type of Americanism, the Jews quite unhesitatingly point to parts of the world and to certain groups as representing the true type of Judaism.

Where is the type to be found which Jewish writers recognize as the true one?

The Jew of the ghetto is held up in Jewish treatises as the norm of Judaism.

The visitor in New York has perhaps seen on Central Park west the massive synagogue of the Spanish and Portuguese Jews. Its famous rabbi was the Rev. Dr. D. de Sola Pool. He is the author of the following words:

"In the ghetto the observance of Judaism was natural and almost inevitable. The regimen of Jewish life was the atmosphere that was breathed . . . Not only did public opinion make it possible for men to go bearded, to keep the head covered at all times, to carry the palm branch in the public street, or to walk the street in stockinged feet on fast days, but public opinion made it almost impossible for a Jew to profane the Sabbath or the Passover regulations, or openly to transgress any of the main observances"—and, as we shall later see, the learned rabbi considers these conditions more preservative of Judaism than are American conditions.

The "Preserving" Influence of the Ghetto

REV. DR. M. H. SEGAL expresses the view that Jewry in the more modern portions of Europe and America was really kept alive by the infusions of immigrants from Poland and Lithuania. Asserting, in agreement with other Jewish leaders, that the Jewish center of the world has been, until now, in Russia and Poland, Dr. Segal says:

"The war has destroyed the last traces of the declining Jewish society which had dragged out its feeble existence in the semi-medieval ghettos of Poland and Lithuania. With all their growing feebleness, these communities were yet the last refuge of Judaism in the Dispersion. In them there had still survived something of the old Jewish life, some of the old Jewish institutions, practices and traditions. These communities also supplied such vitality as they could afford to the attenuated and atrophied Judaism in the communities of the more modern states of Europe and America."

The idea is not at all uncommon—that large infusions of "real Jews" from the Old World ghettos are desirable and necessary in order to keep Judaism alive in countries like the United States.

Israel Friedlaender, whose name just at present is held in peculiar honor by the Jews, and justly so, was a man of most enlightened intellect, and he too recognized the service of the ghetto stream to Judaism. In his lecture, "The Problem of Judaism in America," he speaks about the de-Judaizing tendency of absolute freedom, such as the Jew has always enjoyed in the United States. This tendency, he says, is corrected in two ways—by anti-Semitic influences and "by the large stream of Jewish emigration, on the other hand, which, proceeding from the lands of oppression to the lands of freedom, carries with it, on or under the surface, the preserving and reviving influences of the ghetto."

The same authority, in an article entitled, "The Americanization of the Jewish Immigrant," frankly prefers the Jew fresh from the ghetto to the Jew who has been influenced by American life.

He says that he "prefers the kaftan-clad, old-fashioned Jew, with his unattractive appearance and ungainly manners, whose whole life is dominated by the ideals and mandates of an ancient religion and civilization . . . to that modernized, amphibious creature, the gaudily attired, slang-using, gum-chewing, movie-visiting, dollar-hunting, vulgar and uncultured, quasi-Americanized 'dzentleman.'"

The "kaftan-clad, old-fashioned Jew" of whom Mr. Friedlaender writes, is the Polish Jew, 250,000 of whom are coming to the United States as "a preserving and reviving influence" upon Judaism in the United States.

"American" and "Jewish" Distinct

NOT to use more space, however, on the identity of the normal type of Jew as precisely stated by those who have expressed themselves on this subject, it is possible to preserve the idea and add its logical complement, by quoting some testimony on the Jewish view of Americanization.

What now follows is of special interest because it is so generally stated and received throughout Jewish circles, that the center of Jewry has shifted to America. That is the form in which Jewish spokesmen make the statement: they say "America," not the United States.

A little story—a true one—may be worth while here. It may throw a sidelight on the use of the word "American" as used in the testimony. A certain editor

of an American newspaper gave a trifling bit of publicity to this series of articles. Jewish advertising was withdrawn from his columns by the chairman of the Anti-Defamation Committee of the local Lodge of B'nai B'rith, which chairman was also an advertising agent who handled all the Jewish advertising in that city. The editor, not being a wise man, yielded to the bulldozing methods used upon him, and in a half-hearted bit of editorial praise for the Jews used the word "Americanism." The advertising agent toyed with the word in the manner of one who, having a weak Gentile in his power, would make the best of it.

"Why did you say, 'Americanism'? Why did you not say 'civilization'?" he asked.

The editor to this day thinks it was a bit of capriciousness. It was not. There is meaning in it.

To "Americanize" means, in our ordinary speech, to bring into sympathy with the traditions and institutions of the United States, but the Jews do not mean only the United States when they say "America." They mean also South and Central America—where so many revolutions have occurred. There are large numbers of Jews in Argentina, and many are found in other countries. The next place to be extensively colonized will be Mexico. If the people of the United States see a Jewish ambassador sent to represent them in Mexico, they must know that the invasion of that country is about to begin. If the ambassador is not himself a Jew, it will be well to scrutinize his connections; there may be reasons which will make it necessary to employ a "Gentile front" for a time.

"Judaism Impossible in the United States"

NOW, it would probably give a wrong twist to the fact to say that the Jewish leaders are anti-American, but it is true that they are against the "Americanization" of the Jewish immigrant stream. That is, the trend of "Americanism" is so different from the trend of "Judaism" that the two are in conflict. This does not indicate treason toward American nationalism, perhaps, so much as it indicates loyalty toward Jewish nationalism.

But the reader must himself be the judge as to how far the difference goes. The testimony which will now be given divided itself into two parts: first, that relating to the American state in particular; second, that relating to any Gentile state.

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After he had spoken in praise of the old type of Jew, as seen in the foreign ghettos, Dr. D. de Sola Pool added:

"To a large extent the adult Jewish population of the United States has been reared in Jewish communities of this type of Jewish inevitableness. To a large extent the young generation is being reared in an atmosphere in which this type of Jewishness is unknown, or at least strange and impossible. Jewish religious observance in the United States is becoming increasingly difficult and increasingly rare."

Describing the antagonism between the American and the Jewish tendencies, he continues with this reference to the effect of "Americanism" on Jewish modes of worship:

"On the platform officiate a cantor and a preacher, who turn their backs to the ark and address themselves to their congregation. The tallith and similar externals are un-American, and have consequently been sacrificed. The 'American' worships with bare head; therefore the American of Jewish persuasion must also doff his headgear when at worship. Hebrew, an Oriental language, is not an American tongue. The American prays in English, which all understand, and accordingly the American of Jewish faith has Anglicized his ritual. Such a ritual is not susceptible of being chanted with traditional Jewish Chazzanuth, and the music of the temple has therefore been brought up to date by the introduction of an organ, sacred music borrowed from non-Jewish neighbors, and mixed choirs in which non-Jewish singers are almost the rule . . . The Jewish Sabbath is out of keeping with the environment, and the only way in which it seemed to be possible to save it was by celebrating it with a Friday evening temple service after supper, and resting, and sometimes also attending temple on Sunday."

It is not difficult to detect underneath these words the tone of criticism for such "Americanization." It is a criticism which is fully justified by conditions. And it must be remembered that it was not uttered by a "kaftan-clad, old-fashioned Jew," but by a learned rabbi with a magnificent temple on Central Park west, a man whom our government has seen fit to honor.

But that is not all that Dr. de Sola Pool objects to. Nor does he mince words in making his objection known: "If so far, Reform has avoided the logical end of the process and has stopped short of identifying